English second language learners : a support document for educators

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Rationale

"The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards to race, national or ethnic origin, colour or religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada..."
Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988

Multiculturalism is officially recognized as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society. This diversity of cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups enriches the fabric of national life and gives Canada a strong voice in the global community.

In Canada, multiculturalism is reflected in schools as well as in the larger community. For some students, English is a second or third language. To fully participate in school and community life in a new setting such as Newfoundland and Labrador, these students may need support in learning English. Consistent English Second Language (ESL) programs and related support enable students to reach this goal.

Learners of English as a second language have often had life and school experiences that differ significantly from those of other children in the school. Among ESL learners, linguistic and cultural backgrounds also vary. However, all ESL students share the challenge of learning in a different language and continuing their education in a new setting and culture.

Purpose

This publication is intended to guide administrators and teachers in the reception and orientation of ESL students and their families, and to provide suggestions for program planning and delivery.

Department of Education documents online: www.gov.nf.ca/edu

In Newfoundland and Labrador, ESL learners may be enrolled anywhere in the province. Where numbers warrant, ESL courses and programs are provided by ESL teachers. In other instances, individual students are supported by an appropriate program plan designed at the school.

This publication, *English Second Language Learners: A Support Document for Educators*, is intended to guide administrators and teachers in the reception and orientation of ESL students and their families, and to provide suggestions for program planning and delivery. The online version of the document is available through the Department of Education website.

Definitions

In this document, the following definitions apply:

- Curriculum - courses and programs as defined by the Department of Education or provincially approved local courses.
- Learning resources - resources identified by the Department of Education to support a particular program. Resources may be authorized or recommended, with authorized resources paid for or subsidized by the Department.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) learners - students who are unable to benefit fully from regular classroom instruction because of a lack of comprehension of or facility with the English language; students are usually from countries of origin other than Canada.
- ESL programs - specific English as a Second Language courses and programs.

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- ESL teacher - a teacher trained in the development and delivery of ESL courses and programs.
- ESL team - a team organized at the school level to support ESL students.
- Parents - ESL student's primary care givers. This term also refers to a student's legal guardians.

The ESL Learner

The educational profile of each English as a Second Language student often differs from that of other students. For example, while some students have successfully completed courses and programs at or beyond grade level in their country of origin, others may be in a school setting for the first time. Likewise, the previous language learning experiences of ESL students may vary, ranging from little or no instruction in any language, to detailed study and proficiency in several.

ESL students are undergoing a period of transition as they become familiar with the expectations, routines, and customs of a new language and culture. However, their reactions to that transition may differ. For some, especially those who have witnessed traumatic events, it can be a very difficult process, while for others it may be relatively smooth.

ESL students are in the process of learning a second language. For most, language learning is a long-term endeavour, characterized by periods of rapid learning and slower progress. While general conversational skills may develop quickly, learners of English as a second language need to attain a relatively high level of English proficiency in order to succeed in the overall school program. Functioning for the entire day in a new language is challenging and often mentally exhausting. Therefore, learning another language requires time, commitment, and understanding on the part of learners and educators.

ESL students also share many characteristics with their peers. Like other learners, ESL students have a wide range of academic abilities and personal interests.

Implications

The nature of the ESL learner has important implications for the reception of the student at the school and for the organization of each student's program. Student background, including education, experience, family life, and culture should be considered when welcoming the student and in planning instruction. The administration should provide leadership for good communication, shared responsibility and planning among regular classroom teachers and the itinerant ESL teacher, where one is available. Teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators should work closely with other agencies that may be involved with the student, and with the family, in order to identify effective supports and help ensure a positive transition. While ESL learners are often assumed to have sufficient English to cope with the regular program when they have acquired a certain oral fluency, research indicates that it takes five to seven years of ESL programming for students to achieve what Cummins (1979) describes as Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency. Long-term planning as well as more immediate strategies are required.

Orientation - A Team Approach

English Second Language learners may arrive in a school at any time during the school year. Procedures for receiving students, including plans for the initial welcome and orientation, should be considered prior to student arrival. A team approach is helpful in planning orientation, appropriate programs, and services. The team may include a school administrator, guidance counselor, ESL teacher, homeroom teacher, other teachers, parent, and student. Team meetings are held on a regular basis.

Reception and Registration: First Meeting

A time is established for the first meeting. The student, parents, ESL teacher and/or school administrator, and interpreter (if needed) should attend. At the first meeting, families should be welcomed by an administrator.

This meeting is designed to allow for the introduction of the student and family to school representatives, the exchange of critical information related to the student and the school, and the assessment of student program needs. The principal should ensure that students have the appropriate records required for registration (Appendix A). Without appropriate documentation, students cannot be registered.

At the meeting:

- ensure the student and family complete school registration, data forms, and other related documents on site; provide assistance, including the help of an interpreter, if necessary;
- collect and photocopy important documentation (Appendix A); return the originals to the family and explain the confidential nature of student files;
- provide essential school information in written form and review key points such as scheduling, school floor plan, lunch arrangements, transportation, required items;
- conduct a tour of the school; introduce the family to appropriate staff and to students who speak the same first language;
- decide when the student will start school; leave sufficient time (two or three day maximum) to determine and plan an appropriate placement.

Initial Assessment

A student needs assessment is usually completed during the initial meeting. This should include an assessment of the student's English proficiency. The assessment, while not necessarily done through a formal assessment tool, should consider the student's ability in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. An approximate grade level can be given to reading ability by having the student read passages that are appropriate to the age and interest

of the student. (Due to cultural background and vocabulary, graded reading passages designed for use with English first language learners may not give a true picture of the ESL student's reading comprehension level. Nevertheless, these may provide helpful indicators.) English assessment should be ongoing, and instruction, resources, and activities adjusted to best match learner needs.

Other than those registering for kindergarten, ESL students who are unable to read and write in English should be assessed for literacy skills in their first language. First language literacy will play an important role in how English literacy is taught. A student's level may be determined through an interview with the parent, a review of school reports, or observation of the student writing in the first language. For example, the teacher can note the ease with which the student writes and holds a pencil, the length of the passage, and student skill in copying text. The student should also be assessed in Mathematics to determine appropriate topics or courses and to gain insight into the student's previous schooling.

It is also important to consider the students' emotional, social, and medical needs. A brief profile of the student should include:

- former schooling experiences;
- countries in which the student lived and under what circumstances including war-related trauma;
- specific strengths, hobbies, and interests.

The initial assessment should take no more than one hour to complete. Based on the results, an appropriate program is planned.

Placement

A student is placed with an age-appropriate group. At the primary to intermediate levels, while the placement may be influenced by the student's educational background, there should be no more than a one-year difference in the age of the ESL student and others in the class. Programs and courses are decided by the school administration, with support from staff, including the ESL teacher. The student's English proficiency does not influence the choice of grade placement. However, English proficiency may be a factor in course selection at the high school level. At senior high schools, courses should be selected in conjunction with subject teachers and others responsible for course selection; enrolment in specific ESL courses is recommended by the ESL teacher. At all levels, program decisions are shared and regular communication between all teachers of the student is encouraged.

First School Day

It is recommended that teachers and other personnel who work with the student be informed of the new student's educational, cultural and linguistic background before the student starts school.

Arrange for the student to meet a peer mentor at the start of the day and for the introduction of the student to teachers and pupils.

Staff Orientation

An orientation session, directed by the principal and the ESL team, is helpful for staff members who work with the student. The session may include information about the student's education, language background, and English proficiency, as well as religious, political, geographic, and cultural information about the country of origin. The principal should ensure that communication between school and home occurs. Parents of ESL students who are not literate in English may need to have access to an interpreter. In addition, it is appropriate to review this document and any related school, district or department publications.

Socio-Cultural Awareness

One of the most important aspects of the orientation process is that of socio-cultural awareness. Culture influences a wide range of behaviour. Cultural norms are deeply ingrained and acquired in a subtle manner at a young age; they are often difficult to articulate or recognize even in oneself. An ESL student may not be able to change certain profound beliefs and fundamental behaviour patterns, nor is change necessarily desirable. Students from the same country do not necessarily share the same culture. Some students will have lived in more than one cultural environment. Teachers need to accept differences, but at the same time, foster student awareness and facilitate adjustment through sensitive explanations and models of new cultural behaviours. Cross-cultural understanding requires that teachers, as well as students, reflect on how life decisions and judgments are filtered through one's own cultural background and experiences.

The misinterpretation of cultural norms and signals is a common occurrence when working with ESL students. There may be an inadequate understanding of the culture of the student's home country and, on the part of ESL learners, there may be an inadequate understanding of the new culture. Differences in socio-cultural background may have an impact on student success. Patience, open-mindedness, and tolerance are essential.

Many of the following topics are identified as key areas for cross-cultural understanding in *A Resource Guide for Educators of English Second Language Learners* (New Brunswick, 1996). These and others may be highlighted at team or staff meetings. For additional information see sources listed in the Further Reading section.

- **Immigration status.** Avoid assumptions about ESL learners; some may be refugees, others are not. For some, a change in country has been precipitated by very difficult circumstances; others move for temporary employment, travel, and education opportunities.
- **Public and private behaviour.** Cultural understanding may vary with respect to punctuality, school attendance, values, privacy, and public behaviour. Teachers should obtain information on practices in the student's first culture and carefully explain new expectations to students and parents.
- **Relationships and roles.** Relationships between children and adults, and between males and females, including in-school interaction, may be different.
- **Teaching practices.** The organization of schooling and teaching practices are often unique to a country or region. It will take time for students to adjust to a new school system. Provide specific oral and print information and explain how the school day and calendar, classes, instruction, and student reports are organized.

For cultural profiles, check *cwr.utoronto.ca/cultural/english*

- **Play.** The role and form of play varies from culture to culture. The use of play in instruction and informal activities should be explained to parents and students, since it may differ from the child's previous experience.
- **Holidays and observances.** Teachers should know the most significant observances of ESL students. For example, students may need to be absent from school for certain religious holidays. Ensure that the student and family know common holidays and observances in Canada and in this province.
- **Naming customs.** Parents and children may not have the same family name and the position of names may be different from English. Try to introduce ESL students and family members using correct names and pronunciation.
- **Body language.** Aspects of body language, including gestures, touch, personal space, and eye contact vary. Take time to learn and discuss key areas of difference, particularly those that may lead to significant misunderstandings.
- **Dress.** Clothing and accessories can have cultural and religious meaning. Respect these differences and provide opportunities for students to explain their dress. Help students and families learn appropriate clothing for school, school functions, climate, and culture.
- **Food.** Food, meals, meal schedules, and eating experiences vary greatly. Certain foods are prohibited in some cultures. Provide support for students as they introduce and are introduced to new foods and practices. Recess time, eating in a cafeteria, bringing lunch from home, and class social events may be new for some students.
- **Symbols.** A positive symbol in one culture may represent something quite different in another. This may influence student response to common symbols, as well as the ability of students to identify and use symbols and symbolism in academic tasks.
- **First language use in the home.** Although the student is a second language learner, conversations and activities at home take place almost always in the family's first language. In this fashion cultural identity is partially preserved. Teachers should not encourage nor expect English to be the dominant home language.
- **Activities and outings.** Certain activities, outings or other special events may cause concern for some students and their families. For example, participation in sports such as swimming, field trips such as those to places of religious significance, and overnight travel should be carefully explained to parents. Parents should be informed of school practices, and school personnel should acknowledge the need for occasional exemptions or exceptions.

Pathways to Graduation

Pathways to Programming and Graduation (1999) supports teachers in decision-making and organizational planning for students at the pre-school, primary, elementary, intermediate, and high school levels.

Pathways is a framework to describe the process of planning for individual students.

- It ensures that students are provided with the appropriate program to meet their needs.
- It provides an avenue for the student to meet with success.
- It provides an opportunity for curriculum challenges for students at all ability levels.
- It is designed to bring consistency to student support services across the province.
- It maximizes opportunities for students to achieve to their potential.
- It maximizes opportunities to use the resources of schools/districts most efficiently.

The first two programming pathways (Pathways 1 and 2) are where most students will have their needs met within the provincial curriculum. Pathway 2 identifies the accommodations and adaptations individual students require on a long term, on-going basis in order to experience success in meeting prescribed curriculum outcomes. Students who require additional supports, as indicated through comprehensive assessment, may have modified (Pathway 3) courses designed to meet their individual needs and/or may have an alternate (Pathway 4) course developed to meet their unique needs.

Students who are severely/profoundly mentally handicapped or moderately globally delayed will have an alternate curriculum (Pathway 5) developed to meet their individual needs.

For ESL students, as with all students, it is assumed that they will access the curriculum through Pathway 1. There will be the same need to use good teaching strategies and to explore and manipulate factors to enable the student to meet with success. It is possible a short term instructional intervention may be needed to assist the student to develop the skills necessary to adjust to their new academic and social environment. For some ESL students there may also be a need to pace the curriculum to facilitate the adjustment to the new environments. The expectation is that such supports would be done within the context of the regular classroom and by the classroom teacher. For example, student progress in a Mathematics class may be hindered by the level of language used to teach the concepts. In such situations, the necessary language-related accommodations could be implemented to assist the ESL student.

As the student progresses in language courses which are designed specifically for him/her, the need for language-related accommodations in other courses should decrease. A list of practical classroom suggestions is found on pages 13-15.

If comprehensive assessment indicates that additional supports are required, the Individual Support Services Planning process would be followed and an Individual Support Services Plan developed.

Principles of Second Language Learning

General principles of second language learning influence ESL programming.

- **Developing a high level of second language proficiency may take a very long time.** While basic interpersonal communication skills can usually be acquired within two years in a second language environment, a high level of proficiency (takes five to seven years) for some learners (Cummins 1979, 1982). For the teacher, this means that while an ESL student may appear to be competent in conversation after a year or two, it often takes several years for the learner to achieve the sophisticated level of language required in some academic tasks.
- **Second language learning is a developmental process.** This process is both similar to, and different from, learning a first language. Learners often develop their own creative learner language, referred to as interlanguage (Selinker, 1972). This is neither random nor entirely dictated by the first language, although the first language plays a role. Beginning ESL students often need a period of listening to English before they can be expected to produce orally. Learners of differing first languages (i.e. Arabic, Asian, Slavic) pass through certain stages in the acquisition of the second language. Errors in the target language reflect the learner's position along the developmental continuum and are an unavoidable and natural part of the acquisition process.
- **Individual differences affect learner success.** Factors such as age, motivation and attitude, cognitive style, learning strategies, aptitude as well as personal characteristics like extroversion and tolerance of ambiguity all influence learner progress. There are certain constants in second language development, but there is also much variability among individual learners.
- **Both accuracy and fluency play a significant role in the acquisition of a second language.** A focus on communicative ability and a focus on form are necessary to attain a high level of proficiency in the second language. It is not enough for a learner to be simply exposed to the language.
- **First language literacy has implications for ESL programming.** Student literacy in a first language may affect the time needed to develop second language skills. Students usually learn to read when they have a meaningful vocabulary and can identify and distinguish the sounds of English. Students with limited literacy, as well as those literate in writing systems other than the Roman alphabet, will need to begin their reading program with reading readiness activities. Students who are literate in their first language can transfer cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills both to and from the target language (Cummins, 1999), often resulting in better academic achievement than those students who are not literate in their first language.

ESL Programs

The *Program of Studies* published by the Department of Education contains descriptions of courses offered at the senior high school level, as well as a list of authorized resources for ESL learners and teachers. School districts may also offer locally developed courses, designed to meet the needs of specific groups of ESL learners.

Supporting Instruction

Classroom and subject teachers share, with other staff members, responsibility for assisting students to achieve the outcomes of the prescribed curriculum. When teaching ESL learners, particular attention should be paid to the language development process. Teachers of all content areas can support students by providing guidance in areas such as research methods, the writing process, and the use of computer software. Teachers should help students focus on key errors in oral and written communication, and provide models of correct language use.

Formal and informal discussions, often through the work of an ESL team, ensures effective communication, shared responsibility, and student progress. Other personnel, including special education teachers, itinerant staff, and community resource people should be involved on a needs basis.

School Administrator

Working with ESL learners requires that school administrators demonstrate empathy, support, and flexibility in a wide range of situations. In addition to regular administrative functions, administrators participate in planning, supporting, and monitoring ESL programs; serve as members of the ESL team; and provide leadership in ensuring a welcoming school environment for new students and their families.

Classroom Teacher

The classroom or subject teacher shares the responsibility for ESL students. The teacher should work collaboratively with the ESL team, and may serve as a team member. Teaching practices that facilitate second language learning are encouraged. A number of suggestions are provided on pages 13-14.

English as a Second Language Teacher

The ESL teacher provides expertise in the delivery of ESL programs and courses; the ESL teacher instructs students. This includes student assessment, placement, orientation, student progress files, and reporting. The ESL teacher is a member of the ESL team, and may serve as a liaison with other staff and with community groups.

Guidance Counselor

The guidance counselor helps coordinate support services and provides a link to areas such as career education and specialized personnel (i.e. educational psychologist). The counselor monitors student transition to the school and meets with students, ESL teachers, other staff members, and families as needed.

Suggestions for Classroom Teachers

The following strategies have been found helpful when working with ESL students.

- Prepare other students for the arrival of a new student - pronounce the student's name properly; locate the country of origin; ensure a place close to the front of the class; arrange a peer mentor; label classroom objects and school rooms.
- Provide a warm, supportive learning environment; encourage participation, acceptance, and respect.
- Help students with essential survival expressions such as "May I go to the washroom?", "I don't understand."
- Provide guidance in the selection of courses. For example, at the high school level, students may experience more success in their first year with courses that are less language-dependent.
- Monitor teacher talk - avoid slang, colloquial expressions, and complex structures; speak clearly, using a normal tone and rate of speed; incorporate visuals such as gestures, props, and charts to reinforce key ideas.
- Include ESL learners in classroom activities - administrative and extracurricular as well as academic (i.e. school choir, classroom helper).
- Print and explain homework assignments clearly and consider the time and resources needed to complete the assigned work; it may take ESL learners much longer to complete certain tasks.
- Check for comprehension - use questions that require one-word answers, props, and gestures. Encourage students to ask teachers or other students (peer mentor) for clarification.
- Be available for extra support.
- Provide models of completed homework assignments, projects, video-taped presentations, test items.
- Organize a listening centre with books and tapes for use by ESL students and others; provide simple resources that address topics studied in the content areas.
- Ensure access to bilingual and picture dictionaries and encourage their use; allow students to write in their first language (journals, study notes); have realistic expectations for more complex language tasks in subject areas.
- Assign the ESL student to work with peers who have good communication skills.
- Encourage student self-assessment; for example, to edit written pieces by circling significant errors and reflecting on the writing process.
- Use the ESL student's knowledge of culture and language to enhance learning for other students - have the student introduce a game, song, or story; learn a few words in the student's language; integrate facts about the area of origin in Social Studies or plan a special lesson or unit; have a class interview with the student.

- Seek information about the student's first language and writing system in order to better understand its influence on the student's progress in English. Support continued use of the student's first language; recognize that student conversations with family and friends will likely be in that language.
- Initiate conversation with the student outside the classroom; every conversation is of value to the student and the teacher.

Classroom Environment

Students learn best in a warm supportive environment where their attempts to communicate are valued. Risk-taking in the second language is encouraged, and as long as errors do not impede comprehension, communication should not be interrupted to correct them. Teachers and other students should also be sensitive to the personality and cultural background of the ESL student. For example, some students may begin speaking after a relatively short period of time, while others may be much more reluctant to participate.

ESL students should be included in as many regular classroom and school activities as possible. When the activity is beyond the linguistic ability of the learner, a modified version should be offered, or individual instruction provided.

Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan for ESL students should be developed by the ESL team, in consultation with the student's teachers, and carefully communicated to the student and parents. An evaluation plan should reflect the following principles:

- respect for school and district student evaluation policies;
- inclusion of the student in assessment activities, providing a choice in format where needed;
- fairness and flexibility;
- variety in both formative and summative assessment strategies (i.e. self-assessment, tests, portfolios, projects).

Assessment Suggestions for Teachers

Certain assessment practices are particularly helpful for ESL students. If necessary, teachers should:

- provide clear instructions and explain the task carefully;
- check for comprehension;
- suggest steps to help complete a project and monitor student progress;
- identify alternate resources such as easier reading materials on the same topic;
- provide a choice in topics and in presentation formats;
- ensure that points for language errors are not deducted in content area assessments;
- allow extra time for in-class tests or assignments;
- provide a bilingual or learner's dictionary;
- ensure that the ESL teacher or member of the ESL team is available during formal examinations;
- use oral assessments, such as interviews or oral exams;
- include assessments which are less dependent on written language (pictures, graphs, diagrams, multiple choice items).

Reporting

School reporting procedures - report cards, progress reports, parent/teacher interviews, and grading practices need to be carefully explained to students and parents. Students, parents, and teachers need to recognize that student results are likely to change considerably over time and that early results are not likely indicative of final grades. ESL students receive regular reports from the homeroom/subject teachers. As well, ESL teachers must include information on student progress in English at regular reporting times.

Further Reading

The following resources include teaching suggestions, professional literature, and administrative and organizational ideas. Access to these and similar items would be beneficial for all educators working with ESL learners. Authorized learning resources for students and teachers are listed in the *Program of Studies.*

The More Than Just Surviving Handbook: ESL for Every Classroom Teacher

Law, B. & Eckes, M. (2000). *The More Than Just Surviving Handbook: ESL for Every Classroom Teacher.* Winnipeg, MB: Portage and Main Press/Regius Publisher.

ESL Learners in non-ESL Classrooms: Look at Me When I Talk to You

Helmer, S. & Eddy, C. (1996). *ESL Learners in non-ESL Classrooms: Look at Me When I Talk to You.* Markham, ON: Pippin Publishers.

ESL is Everybody's Business

Parkin, F. & Sidnell, F. (1992). *ESL is Everybody's Business.* Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

Cultural Profiles Project

cwr.utoronto.ca/cultural/english

TESL Canada

www.tesl.ca

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Records and Documentation

Before registering students, the principal should ensure that students have appropriate documents. These may include previous official school transcripts along with course content descriptions translated into English by a recognized translator or translation agency. For some students tuition payment is required. Principals are encouraged to check for the most current information with regard to fees, documentation, and registration procedures.

All students must show one of the following documents to be eligible for school registration in Newfoundland and Labrador:

1. Proof of Canadian citizenship (e.g. passport, birth certificate, citizenship certificate)

OR

2. Proof of landed immigrant/permanent resident status (Form: IMM1000 at the time of publication)

OR

3. Student authorization or Minister's permit, issued by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to:

   - refugee claimants
   - students in Canada temporarily because of parent's employment or study
   - students who have come to study in Canada without an accompanying parent (traditionally called visa students)

In addition, copies of immunization records, past school records, and an MCP card or proof of health insurance may be needed to ensure that school information is as complete as possible.